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(54) **CARRIER IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM,
CARRIER IDENTIFICATION METHOD AND
STORAGE MEDIA**

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(76) **Inventors: Yuuji Kawanishi, Tokyo (JP); Yoshiaki
Uchino, Tokyo (JP)**

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Correspondence Address:
FLYNN, THIEL, BOUTELL & TANIS, P.C.
2026 Rambling Road
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-1699 (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

In a horizontal carriage type auto handler, it is possible to identify a carrier efficiently without stopping the carrier when reading the carrier identification information provided in the carrier for transferring a device and to reduce the number of sensors for reading identification information. A plurality of timing holes and data holes are provided in the carrier as identification information. The carrier is detected when a timing hole detection sensor and a data hole detection sensor detect the timing holes and the data holes.

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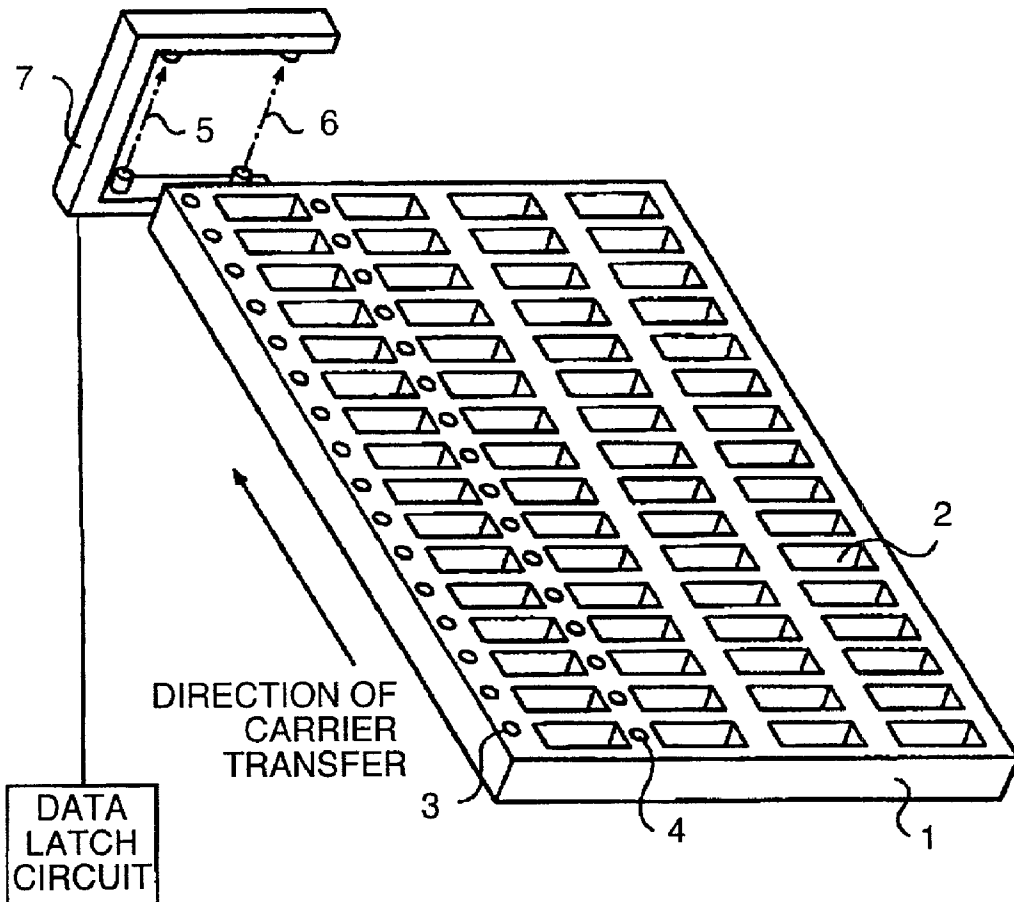


FIG. 1

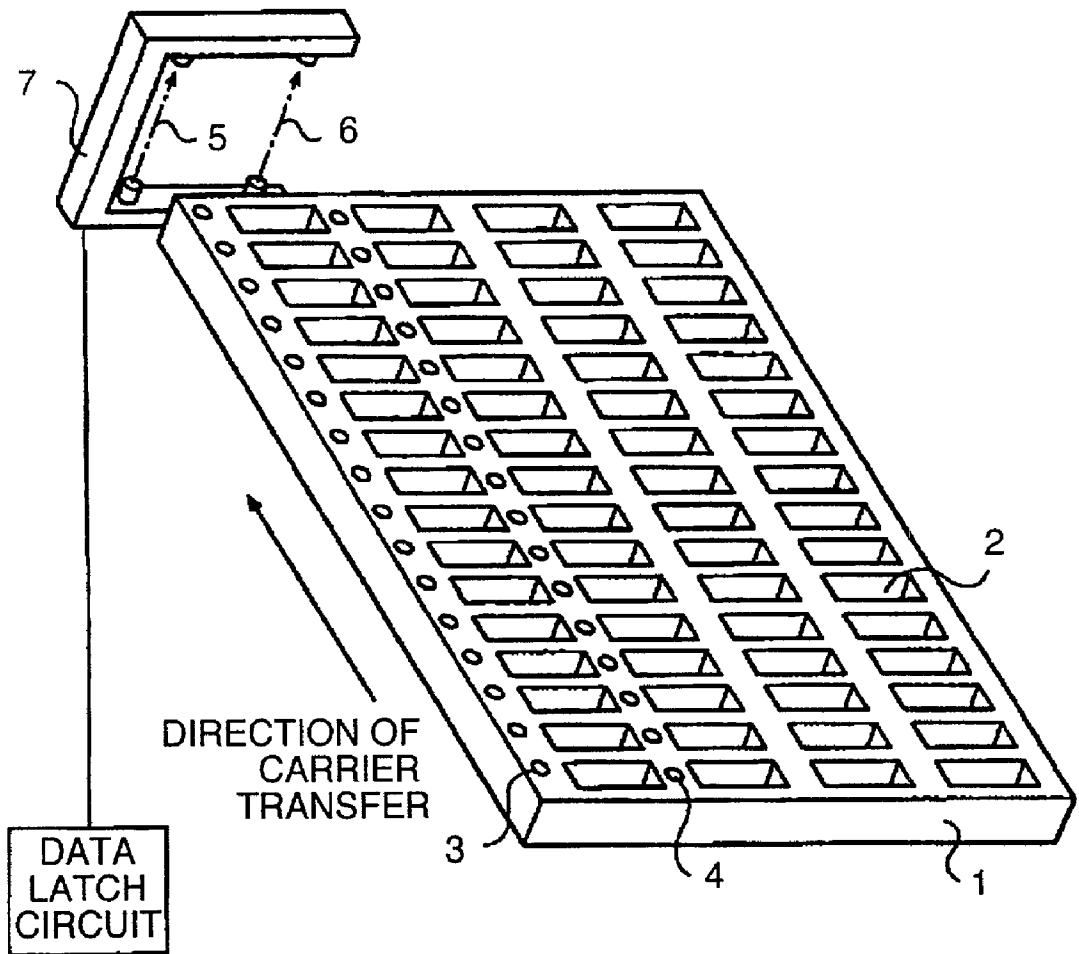


FIG. 2

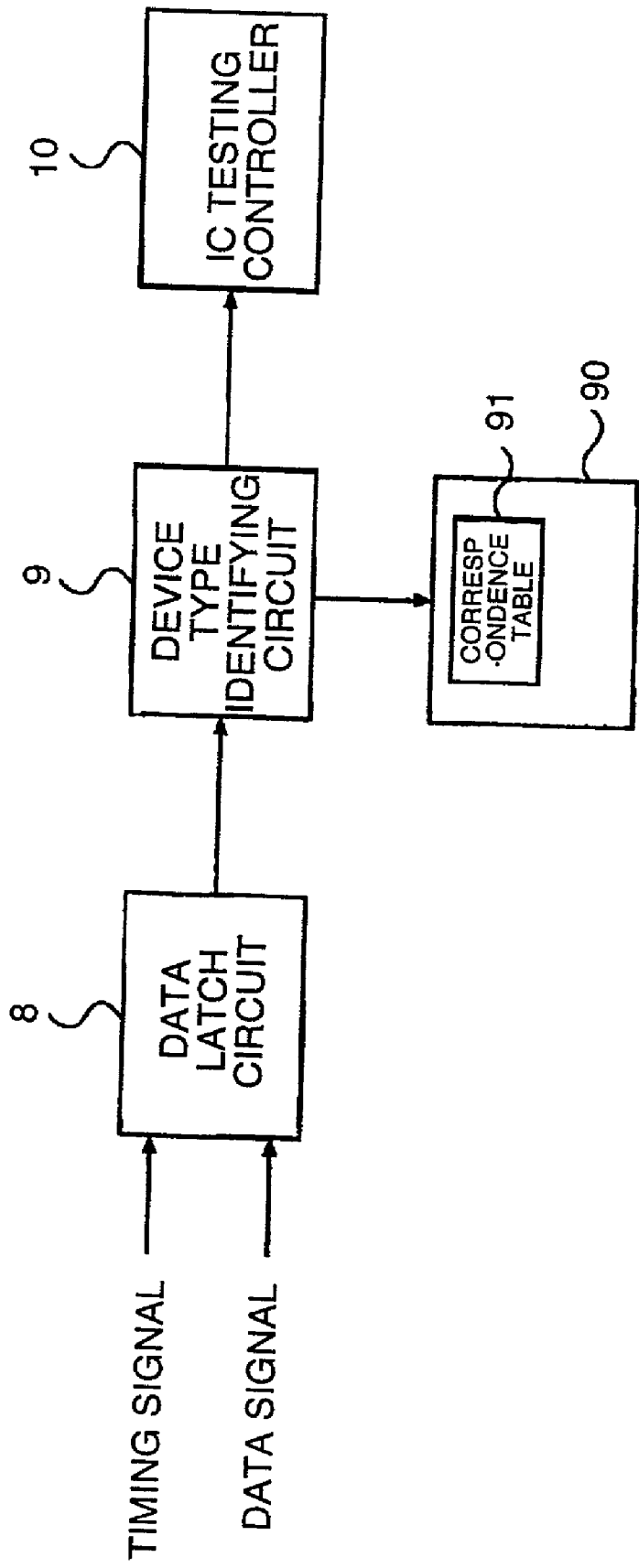


FIG. 3 (A)

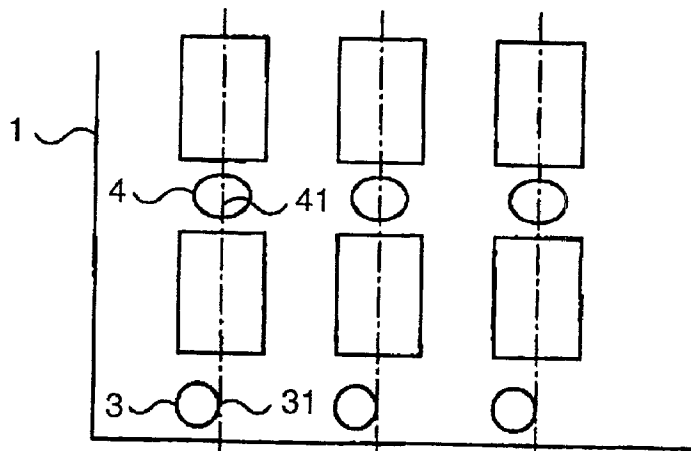


FIG. 3 (B)

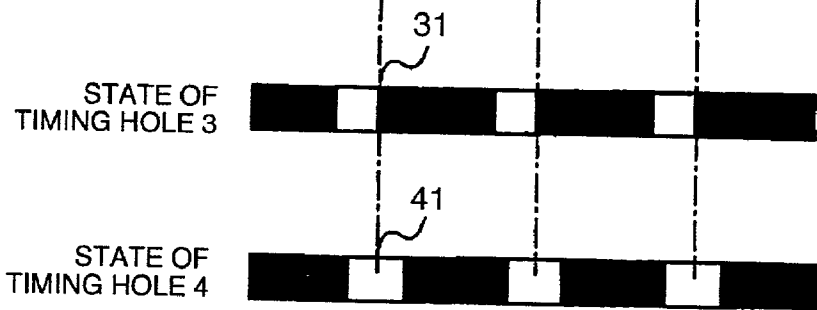
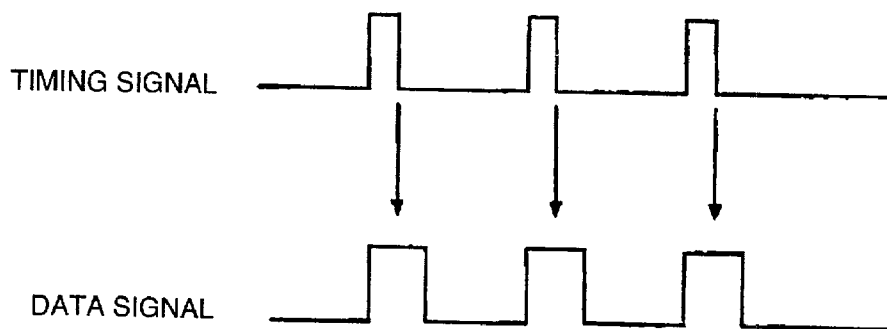


FIG. 3 (C)



CARRIER IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM, CARRIER IDENTIFICATION METHOD AND STORAGE MEDIA

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to a carrier identification system for transferring semiconductor devices, and so forth, in an auto handler, a carrier identification method, and storage media.

[0003] 2. Related Art

[0004] In an IC testing system for measuring electric properties of semiconductor devices such as an IC (integrated circuit), and so forth, use is made of an auto handler for transferring devices as objects for measurement. Semiconductor devices as objects for testing are mounted in a carrier, and selected by the auto handler.

[0005] In such a case, a plurality of carriers are simultaneously circulated inside the auto handler in order to improve efficiency, thereby selecting ICs.

[0006] Further, since the form of the carriers varies depending on a type of the semiconductor devices as the objects for testing, a controller of the auto handler needs to identify types of the semiconductor devices to be tested.

[0007] It is further required that, for example, nine units of the carriers are circulated inside the auto handler, and the respective carriers are assigned a serial number so as to be able to monitor all the time where the respective carriers are located inside the auto handler.

[0008] Accordingly, with a conventional auto handler, the respective carriers are assigned a bar code for carrier identification in order to identify a type of a semiconductor device mounted in the respective carriers, and the serial number of the respective carriers. A bar code reader reads the bar code assigned to the respective carriers, and identify the type of the semiconductor device mounted in the respective carriers, and the serial number of the respective carriers, on the basis of the bar code as read.

[0009] The above-described method is disclosed by the applicant of the present invention in, for example, Japanese Patent Application No. H 10-377095.

[0010] Further, there is available another method of identifying a type of semiconductor devices whereby a plurality of holes for identification are formed on a carrier. With this method, a plurality of sensors installed so as to correspond to the respective holes for identification read the holes for identification, provided in the carrier, and identify the type of semiconductor devices mounted in the carrier depending on a state of the holes, as read.

[0011] However, with the former method as described, the carrier needs to be stopped every time there is a need of reading data for carrier identification, and it has also been required that a location for stopping the carrier be in full agreement with that of a sensor for reading.

[0012] Meanwhile, with the latter method as described, whereby the holes for identification are formed in the carrier, it has been required that as many sensors for reading out as the holes for identification be installed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] Thus, problems to be solved by the invention are to eliminate a need of stopping carriers for transferring devices in order to read the data for carrier identification, and to be able to do with less numbers of the sensors for reading the data for carrier identification.

[0014] To solve the problems as described above, a carrier identification system according the first aspect of the invention, comprises a carrier (for example, a carrier **1** in **FIG. 1**) for mounting and transferring a plurality of devices to be tested (hereinafter referred to as DUTs), having identification information thereof, reading means (for example, a timing hole detection sensor **5** and a data hole detection sensor **6**, in **FIG. 1**) for reading the identification information of the carrier, and identification means (for example, a device type identifying circuit **9** in **FIG. 1**) for identifying the carrier on the basis of the identification information as read by the reading means, wherein the carrier is provided with a plurality of timing holes (for example, timing holes **3** in **FIG. 1**) arranged in parallel with a direction of carrier transfer, and a plurality of data holes (for example, data holes **4** in **FIG. 1**) arranged in parallel with the direction of the carrier transfer, corresponding to arrangement locations of the plurality of the timing holes, and the reading means is provided with timing detection means (for example, timing hole detection sensor **5** in **FIG. 1**) disposed so as to correspond to the arrangement locations of the plurality of the timing holes, for detecting the plurality of the timing holes in conjunction with the carrier transfer, and data detection means (for example, data hole detection sensor **6** in **FIG. 1**) disposed so as to correspond to arrangement locations of the plurality of the data holes, for detecting the plurality of the data holes in conjunction with detection of the plurality of the timing holes by the timing detection means.

[0015] Further, a carrier identification method according to the third aspect of the invention comprises a transfer step of transferring a plurality of DUTs by use of a carrier with the plurality of the devices mounted therein, a reading step for reading identification information provided in the carrier, and an identification step of identifying the carrier on the basis of the identification information as read, said reading step including a timing detection step of detecting a plurality of timing holes arranged on the carrier, in parallel with a direction of carrier transfer, in conjunction with the carrier transfer, and a data detection step of detecting a plurality of data holes arranged on the carrier, in parallel with the direction of the carrier transfer, in conjunction with the timing detection step.

[0016] Still further, storage media according to the fifth aspect of the invention capable of storing a program executable by a computer including a program code for reading identification display provided in a carrier with DUTs mounted therein, and a program code for identifying the carrier on the basis of the identification display as read, said storage media further storing a program code for detecting a plurality of timing holes arranged in parallel with a direction of carrier transfer, and a program code for detecting a plurality of data holes arranged in parallel with the direction of the carrier transfer.

[0017] Therefore, according to the first, third and fifth aspects of the invention, the plurality of the timing holes and the data holes, disposed as the identification display in the carrier with the devices mounted therein, can be read one after another by the timing hole detection sensor and the data hole detection sensor, respectively, while the carrier is being transferred. As a result, it is possible to eliminate a need of stopping the carrier every time the identification display is read.

[0018] Further, as the sensors for reading the identification display, only two kinds of sensors, that is, the timing hole detection sensor and the data hole detection sensor, are sufficient, and the number of the timing holes and the data holes can be increased or decreased with ease so as to correspond to the number of types of the carriers to be identified.

[0019] The invention according to the second aspect of the invention is a carrier identification system in the first aspect of the invention, wherein the timing detection means detect the plurality of the timing holes by transmission or shutoff of light, the data detection means detect whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes by transmission or shutoff of light, and the identification means generate a given code row according to whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes as detected, thereby identifying the carrier on the basis of the code row as generated.

[0020] The invention according to the fourth aspect of the invention is a carrier identification method in the third aspect of the invention, wherein the timing detection step detects the plurality of the timing holes by transmission or shutoff of light, the data detection step detects whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes by transmission or shutoff of light, and the identification step generates a given code row according to whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes as detected, thereby identifying the carrier on the basis of the code row as generated.

[0021] The invention according to the sixth aspect of the invention is storage media capable of storing a program executable by a computer, in the fifth aspect of the invention, further storing a program code for detecting the plurality of the timing holes by transmission or shutoff of light, a program code for detecting whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes by transmission or shutoff of light, a program code for generating a given code row according to whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes as detected, and a program code for identifying a carrier on the basis of the code row as generated.

[0022] Therefore, according to the second, fourth and sixth aspects of the invention, a state of the respective timing holes as well as the respective data holes as identification information can be detected by two kinds of states, that is, transmission and shutoff of light. By outputting and extracting such states as detected as digital signals, it is possible to set data rows wherein "1" and "0" are arranged. The DUTs can be identified by use of the data rows as the identification information.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0023] FIG. 1 is a perspective view showing an embodiment of a carrier identification system according to the invention;

[0024] FIG. 2 is a view showing flow of signals detected by sensors; and

[0025] FIG. 3 shows a partially enlarged view of a carrier 1 and a view indicating a relationship between the carrier and signals outputted by the sensors.

PREFERRED EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

[0026] An embodiment of the invention is described in detail hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings. First, the constitution thereof is described as follows.

[0027] FIG. 1 is a perspective view showing an embodiment of a carrier identification system according to the invention, made up of a carrier 1, a timing hole detection sensor 5, a data hole detection sensor 6, and a data latch circuit 8.

[0028] On the surface of the carrier 1, there are formed a plurality of cavities for mounting semiconductor devices as objects for testing, amounting to 64 in number, arrayed in rows and columns (16 rows×4 columns). Further, the carrier 1 is provided with timing holes 3 and data holes 4, which are formed in numbers corresponding to the number of the rows, as through-holes arranged in a transfer direction of the carrier 1, and which are defined on the side of the opposite short sides of the respective cavities 2, respectively, in such a way as to correspond to the respective locations of the cavities 2 lined up in the direction of columns of the carrier 1.

[0029] The timing hole detection sensor 5, and the data hole detection sensor 6, made up of a light emitting device in combination with an optical receiver, respectively, are installed on opposed faces on the side of the upper side and on the side of the lower side of a fitting member 7 in a form substantially resembling the letter U, respectively, and at a spacing identical to that provided between the respective timing holes 3 and the respective data holes 4. Further, the timing hole detection sensor 5 and the data hole detection sensor 6 detect a state of light being shut off from or transmitted through the timing holes 3, and the data holes 4, respectively, of the carrier 1 which is being transferred,

[0030] Further, the timing hole detection sensor 5 and the data hole detection sensor 6 output a timing signal and a data signal, respectively, for expressing a detection condition of the timing holes 3 and the data holes 4, respectively, to be sent out to the data latch circuit 8.

[0031] FIG. 3 (A) is a partially enlarged plan view of the carrier 1, FIG. 3 (B) a sectional view of the timing holes 3 and data holes 4, formed as through-holes in the carrier 1, and FIG. 3 (C) shows the timing signal and the data signal as outputted by the timing hole detection sensor 5 and the data hole detection sensor 6, respectively.

[0032] The data holes 4 are formed so as to correspond to the timing holes 3, respectively, and as shown in FIG. 3 (A), both the holes are configured such that a straight line

interconnecting the center **41** of the respective data holes **4** and an edge **31** of the respective timing holes **3** is rendered perpendicular to the transfer direction of the carrier **1**.

[0033] Further, as shown in **FIG. 3 (B)**, light is transmitted through a region (shown in white) where the respective timing holes **3** are formed, and shut off from all other regions (shown in black).

[0034] The timing hole detection sensor **5** and the data hole detection sensor **6** detect a state of light being shut off from or transmitted through the timing holes **3**, and the data holes **4** of the carrier **1** being transferred, respectively. That is, as shown in **FIG. 3 (C)**, the timing hole detection sensor **5** and the data hole detection sensor **6** output the timing signal and the data signal as digital signals, respectively.

[0035] Further, as shown in the figure, the timing signal and the data signal undergo a change at an edge of the respective timing holes **3** and an edge of the respective data holes **4**, respectively, that is, on the boundary face between the region in black and the region in white, turning to a low level when light is shut off therefrom, and turning to a high level when light is transmitted therethrough.

[0036] Then, upon the timing hole detection sensor **5** detecting the edge **21** of the respective timing holes **3**, that is, upon detecting that a state of light relative to the respective timing holes **3** has undergone a change from a transmission state to a shutoff state (that is, change from a high level to a low level), the timing signal is extracted by the data latch circuit **8**.

[0037] Thus, every time the respective timing holes **3** pass through a position of the timing hole detection sensor **5**, the timing signal is extracted by the data latch circuit **8**, and subsequently, the data signal outputted from the data hole detection sensor **6** is extracted. It is possible to set data rows of 16 bits in length, one bit expressing whether or not there exist the respective data holes **4**, in numbers identical to the number of the timing holes **3** for every carrier. Types of the devices as the objects for testing are expressed by the data rows.

[0038] More specifically, in order to cause the data rows of 16 bits in length wherein "1" and "0" are arranged to correspond to the types of the respective DUTs mounted in the carrier **1** by detecting whether or not there exist each of 16 pieces of the data holes **4**, the respective data holes **4** are formed at positions corresponding to "1" within the respective data rows of 16 bits, for expressing the types of the DUTs, but are not formed at other positions corresponding to "0". However, as for the timing holes **3**, all of 16 pieces thereof are formed, and are used as a guide function for providing timing for extraction of the data signal.

[0039] Accordingly, $65536 (=2^{16})$ types of DUTs can be identified by making use of the data holes **4**.

[0040] As shown in **FIG. 2**, the timing signal and the data signal are inputted from the timing hole detection sensor **5** and the data hole detection sensor **6**, respectively, to the data latch circuit **8**. At a time when the timing signal as inputted undergoes a change from a high level to a low level, the data latch circuit **8** extracts the data signal, and latches the data signal of 16 bits in length, and inputs the same to a device type identifying circuit **9**.

[0041] The device type identifying circuit **9** refers to a correspondence table **91** stored in storage media **90** on the basis of the data signal of 16 bits in length, inputted from the data latch circuit **8**, identifies the type of the DUTs, mounted in the carrier **1**, and outputs the type as identified to a IC testing controller **10**.

[0042] The correspondence table **91** stores a plurality of the data rows of 16 bits in length in such a way as to correspond to the respective types of the DUTs, and is stored in the storage media **90** of the device type identifying circuit **9**.

[0043] The IC testing controller **10** checks whether or not the types of the DUTs as inputted from the device type identifying circuit **9** is in agreement with types of devices as the objects of a test now under way. In case that there is no agreement, a step for control such as stopping the test now under way is taken.

[0044] Now, operation is described hereinafter.

[0045] As shown in **FIG. 1**, the carrier **1** with a semiconductor device as the object for IC testing, mounted in the plurality of the cavities **2** thereof, respectively, is transferred and passed between the upper side part, and the lower side part of the fitting member **7** with the timing hole detection sensor **5** and the data hole detection sensor **6**, attached thereto.

[0046] The timing hole detection sensor **5** detects a state of light in relation to the respective timing holes **3** upon the optical receiver receiving light outputted by the light emitting device. Upon the carrier **1** passing the timing hole detection sensor **5**, light outputted by the light emitting device is shut off, however, upon the respective timing holes **3** passing the timing hole detection sensor **5**, light is not shut off by the respective timing holes **3**, and is transmitted therethrough. The timing hole detection sensor **5** outputs such a state of light as the timing signal shown in **FIG. 3 (C)** to the data latch circuit **8**.

[0047] Similarly to the case of the timing hole detection sensor **5**, the data hole detection sensor **6** also detects a state of the respective data holes **4** through shutoff and transmission of the light outputted by the light emitting device. Then, a state of the light as detected is outputted as the data signal shown in **FIG. 3 (C)** to the data latch circuit **8**.

[0048] Upon receiving the timing signal and the data signal as shown in **FIG. 3 (C)** from the timing hole detection sensor **5** and the data hole detection sensor **6**, respectively, the data latch circuit **8** extracts the data signal inputted according to a change in a state of the timing signal inputted.

[0049] More specifically, at a time when the timing hole detection sensor **5** detects a change in a state of the light from transmission to shutoff, the data signal is extracted. It means that, in **FIG. 3 (A)**, upon the timing hole detection sensor **5** passing the edge **31** of the respective timing holes **3**, a state of the center **41** of the respective data holes **4** is extracted.

[0050] Further, every time the respective timing holes **3** pass the position of the timing hole detection sensor **5** of the fitting member **7** following transfer of the carrier **1**, the data latch circuit **8** extracts the data signals one after another, corresponding to states of the respective data holes **4** passing the position of the data hole detection sensor **6**.

[0051] After latching the data signals corresponding to 16 bits as extracted following transfer of the carrier **1**, the data latch circuit **8** outputs the data rows of 16 bits in length to the device type identifying circuit **9**.

[0052] The device type identifying circuit **9** refers to the correspondence table **91** stored in the storage media **90** on the basis of arrangement of "0" and "1" as set in the respective data signals of 16 bits in length, inputted from the data latch circuit **8**, thereby identifying the type of the respective DUTs, mounted in the carrier **1**.

[0053] Upon identification of the type of the respective devices, the device type identifying circuit **9** outputs the types as identified to the IC testing controller **10**, and clears the data signals inputted thereto.

[0054] Thereafter, the IC testing controller **10** performs control of operation while identifying types of the devices on the basis of the types inputted from the device type identifying circuit **9** every time the carrier **1** is transferred.

[0055] As described hereinbefore, in order to obtain identification information for identifying devices mounted in the carrier **1** for mounting the devices as objects for testing, the plurality of the timing holes **3** and the data holes **4** are provided. By detecting the state of the timing holes **3** as well as the data holes **4** by the agency of the optical sensors, the identification information can be read while the carrier **1** is being transferred.

[0056] Accordingly, since there is no need of stopping the carrier **1** when reading the identification information, delay in operation of the auto handler can be prevented.

[0057] Further, as the timing hole detection sensor and the data hole detection sensor for reading identification data can be made up of the light emitting device and the optical receiver, addition of the sensors, and addition of the timing holes as well as data holes, corresponding to an increase in the number of types to be identified, can be implemented with ease.

[0058] According to the first, third and fifth aspects of the invention, the plurality of the timing holes and the data holes, disposed as the identification display in the carrier with the devices mounted therein, can be read one after another by the timing hole detection sensor and the data hole detection sensor, respectively, while the carrier is being transferred. As a result, it is possible to eliminate a need of stopping the carrier every time the identification display is read.

[0059] Further, as the sensors for reading the identification display, only two kinds of sensors, that is, the timing hole detection sensor and the data hole detection sensor, are sufficient, and the number of the timing holes and the data holes can be increased or decreased with ease so as to correspond to the number of types of the carriers to be identified.

[0060] According the second, fourth and sixth aspects of the invention, a state of the respective timing holes as well as the respective data holes as the identification information can be detected in two kinds of states, that is, transmission and shutoff of light, in addition of the effect of the first, third and fifth aspects of the invention. By outputting and extracting such states as detected in the form of digital signals, it

is possible to set the data rows wherein "1" and "0" are arranged. The DUTs, for example, can be identified by use of the data rows as the identification information.

What is claimed is:

1. A carrier identification system comprising:

a carrier for mounting and transferring a plurality of devices under test, having identification information thereof;

reading means for reading the identification information of the carrier; and

identification means for identifying the carrier on the basis of the identification information as read by the reading means,

wherein the carrier is provided with a plurality of timing holes arranged in parallel with a direction of carrier transfer, and

a plurality of data holes arranged in parallel with the direction of the carrier transfer, corresponding to arrangement locations of the plurality of the timing holes, and

the reading means is provided with timing detection means disposed so as to correspond to the arrangement locations of the plurality of the timing holes, for detecting the plurality of the timing holes in conjunction with the carrier transfer, and

data detection means disposed so as to correspond to arrangement locations of the plurality of the data holes, for detecting the plurality of the data holes in conjunction with detection of the plurality of the timing holes by the timing detection means.

2. The carrier identification system according to claim 1, wherein the timing detection means detect the plurality of the timing holes by transmission or shutoff of light, the data detection means detect whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes by transmission or shutoff of light, and the identification means generate a given code row according to whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes as detected, thereby identifying the carrier on the basis of the code row as generated.

3. A carrier identification method comprising:

a transfer step of transferring a plurality of devices under test by use of a carrier with the plurality of the devices mounted therein;

a reading step for reading identification information provided in the carrier; and

an identification step of identifying the carrier on the basis of the identification information as read, said reading step including:

a timing detection step of detecting a plurality of timing holes arranged on the carrier, in parallel with a direction of carrier transfer, in conjunction with the carrier transfer, and

a data detection step of detecting a plurality of data holes arranged on the carrier, in parallel with the direction of the carrier transfer, in conjunction with the timing detection step.

4. The carrier identification method according to claim 3, wherein the timing detection step detects the plurality of the timing holes by transmission or shutoff of light, the data detection step detects whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes by transmission or shutoff of light, and the identification step generates a given code row according to whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes as detected, thereby identifying the carrier on the basis of the code row as generated.

5. Storage media for storing a program executable by a computer including:

- a program code for reading identification display provided in a carrier with devices under test mounted therein; and
- a program code for identifying the carrier on the basis of the identification display as read, said storage media further storing:

a program code for detecting a plurality of timing holes arranged in parallel with a direction of carrier transfer, and

a program code for detecting a plurality of data holes arranged in parallel with the direction of the carrier transfer.

6. The storage media according to claim 5, further storing a program code for detecting the plurality of the timing holes by transmission or shutoff of light, a program code for detecting whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes by transmission or shutoff of light, a program code for generating a given code row according to whether or not there exist the plurality of the data holes as detected, and a program code for identifying a carrier on the basis of the code row as generated.

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